



House Criminal Justice Committee
Proponent Testimony for House Bill 531
Emily Gemar, Public Policy Director
Ohio Alliance to End Sexual Violence
June 12, 2024

Chair Abrams, Vice Chair Williams, Ranking Member Brown and members of the House Criminal Justice Committee:

The Ohio Alliance to End Sexual Violence (OAESV) is the statewide coalition for Ohio's rape crisis centers. We advocate for comprehensive responses and rape crisis services for survivors and empower communities to end sexual violence. OAESV currently has 36 rape crisis programs that serve 79 counties in Ohio. These programs provide essential services to survivors of sexual violence, domestic violence, stalking, and human trafficking. We respectfully urge the House Criminal Justice Committee to report favorably on House Bill 531.

House Bill 531 would criminalize acts of sexual extortion to hold offenders accountable for the crimes they commit. Sexual extortion occurs when a person abuses their power or authority to coerce sexual acts, images, or videos from a victim. Sexual extortion is a rapidly growing form of sexual exploitation—often facilitated by technology. It is essentially a form of virtual sexual assault, wherein perpetrators exploit and harm victims from a distance and can prey upon multiple victims at the same time. In fact, the majority of perpetrators are prolific repeat offenders.¹

We have seen the troubling nationwide trend of sexual extortion impacting more and more children. With this particular type of crime, young people are the most common targets—71% of victims involved in sexual extortion cases are 18 or younger.² Victims are most often targeted through social media networks and other online spaces, where perpetrators manipulate their victims into sending them sexually explicit content and demand money, favors, or other actions from the victim. Perpetrators often use deception and threats to control and terrorize victims, often resulting in serious emotional, physical, psychological, and reputational harm to the victim. The National Center for Missing & Exploited Children notes that since 2021, there has been a more than 300 percent rise in cases of online enticement and this kind of harassment.³

The negative impacts of sexual extortion are far-reaching and can have lethal consequences for victims. OAESV advocates for the rights and needs of sexual assault victims throughout Ohio, including victims who often fall through the cracks, such as those impacted by sexual extortion. If passed, this bill will establish sexual extortion as the serious sex crime that it is, helping victims and their families access support and justice.

We also encourage the Legislature to continue its focus on the increasing issue of sexual extortion of youth by prioritizing support and funding for prevention education in K-12 schools and community

¹ Brookings Institute. (2016). Sextortion: Cybersecurity, teenagers, and remote sexual assault. <https://www.brookings.edu/articles/sex-tortion-cybersecurity-teenagers-and-remote-sexual-assault/>

² *Ibid.*

³ National Center for Missing and Exploited Children. <https://www.missingkids.org/ourwork/impact>

settings to educate young people and families about online safety in order to prevent these crimes from taking place. Investment in comprehensive prevention education and skills-building are the only ways we will see true prevention of these egregious crimes.

Thank you for the opportunity to provide testimony on House Bill 531. I am available to answer any questions at egemar@oaesv.org.